

Responding to anti-refugee messages in the wake of the November 2015 Paris attacks

In light of the tragic events in Paris on November 13, 2015, we have seen a vitriolic backlash against refugees and Muslims, especially in the United States. This is no accident. The organized anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim movements are strategically using the Paris attacks to further their bigoted agenda to maintain a white European majority in the United States. The leaders in these movements have effectively mobilized their allies to echo a few key messages that spread fear and hate of Muslims and conflate refugees with terrorists.

We must be able to respond to these messages directly, swiftly and with clear purpose. We must identify harmful rhetoric and expose the drivers of organized bigotry in order to dilute the influence they have on public policy and discourse, while we simultaneously lifting up the stories of those seeking safety and refuge in the United States.

This document identifies three common opposition messages and provides “bridge messages” to help advocates transition to their own positive messages in support of the rights of refugees, immigrants, and Muslim communities.

Attacks on Muslims and Islam

1. Our opponents argue: Islam is a violent religion. Even if a majority of Muslims are not perpetrating attacks, the religion must be countered directly in order to stem the terror and violence against the West.
2. Our opponents argue: The United States cannot be afraid to call these attackers by name: Islamic terrorists. The terror attack in Paris is part of an organized effort to destroy Western Civilization and we must defeat it with strong leadership from the United States, not by kowtowing to political correctness as President Obama is doing.

Examples of opponents' messages:

- [Bosch Fatswin on Twitter](#): Muslims who condemn the violence being done in the name of Islam: Your religion sanctions it. Your prophet engaged in it. Enough of the BS. (11/14/15)
- [Sen. Marco Rubio](#) (R-FL): Arguing that the United States is “at war with radical Islam,” he sharply criticized those who refuse to blame Islam. (11/14/15)
- [Jeb Bush](#): These are Islamic terrorists that are trying to take out our country and destroy Western civilization...This is radical Islamic terrorism, period, over and out. And we should have a strategy to take it out. (11/16/15)

Bridge messages:

- The organized anti-Muslim movement is well-financed, well-organized and pervasive in American politics. They have worked hard to conflate those who commit acts of terrorism with Muslims practicing their faith. Scapegoating the global Muslim community for the horrific actions of a few claiming to act in the name of the religion is a cynical tactic to push an extremist and hateful agenda.

- Anti-refugee extremists fostering fear about the destruction of Western civilization is a transparently racist strategy to advance an extreme anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant agenda. It is a thinly veiled call to halt the ongoing demographic shift away from a white majority in the United States by excluding immigrants and refugees based on the color of their skin or how they pray.
- By using unsupported accusations and painting an entire diverse group of individuals with a single brush, anti-Muslim, anti-refugee extremists are trying to appeal to the public's worst instincts.

Closing message:

- Those responsible for the attacks in Paris are not representative of the large and diverse global Muslim community. We owe it to ourselves to offer refugees protection from violence and the opportunity to raise their families in safety. Many of our grandparents came to the United States to escape persecution and were offered the opportunity to become Americans. We must keep this legacy alive for today's refugees and create the kind of welcoming nation in which we want to live.
- The American public must reject the anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant hate being spewed by politicians and pundits alike. The U.S. can only live up to our highest values and ideals by welcoming those fleeing violence and persecution into our communities, no matter their race or religion.

Attacks of American refugee programs

Our opponents argue that the Paris attacks illustrate that the United States should not admit Muslim immigrants or refugees, especially from Syria, because they will only bring terrorism to our shores.

Examples of opponents' messages:

- [Rand Paul](#): "I think one of the lessons we should learn from the tragedy in Paris is that we have to be very careful, and very cautious — extraordinarily cautious — about who comes to visit, who immigrates here and who studies here." (11/16/15)
- [The Clarion Project](#): "The West must stop believing Islamist terror is something that only affects Syria. If the horrors of this weekend don't signal alarm bells, what will?" (11/14/15)

Bridge message:

- Anti-refugee extremists' calls for a religion test for prospective Syrian refugees show their movement's bigoted and un-American values and blatant [disregard](#) for the Constitution. The pursuit of this sort of blatantly discriminatory policy only serves as proof that these activists must be excluded from any reasonable conversation about America's immigration and refugee programs.

Closing message:

- The United States has a proud history of welcoming refugees. Yet some elected officials are undermining that tradition by advancing impractical anti-refugee measures that drive fear and misunderstanding.
- The devastating attacks in Paris were carried out by the very people from which Syrian refugees are fleeing. Instead of allowing these attacks to divide us and foster hate, they should inspire our compassion for refugees facing similar violence. We must call on our elected leaders to reject xenophobic attacks and instead reaffirm our commitment to fostering an open and welcoming democracy in which humanitarian efforts are embraced.

Attacks on American Muslims

Our opponents argue that we must use all tools to root out Islamic extremists already residing in the United States. The Paris attacks should reignite our commitment to rooting out terrorists and extremists within the American Muslim community. U.S. authorities must implement increased surveillance of Muslim communities in mosques and neighborhoods, and all moderate Muslims should act as willing partners.

Examples:

- [Rep. Peter King](#) (R-NY): “We have to put political correctness aside. We have to have surveillance in the Muslim communities. That’s where the threat is coming from.”
- [Donald Trump](#): “Nobody wants to say this and nobody wants to shut down religious institutions or anything, but you know, you understand it. A lot of people understand it. We’re going to have no choice.” (11/18/15)

Bridge message

- By calling for the use of discredited and ineffective surveillance programs anti-refugee activists are perpetuating the bigoted idea of Muslim Americans as threats to, or as different from, the American public at large. Every day, American Muslims are confronted with this sort of bigotry while driving to work and school, applying for jobs, practicing their faith, and simply living their lives. These prejudicial policies only serve to further those injustices.

Closing message

- We cannot allow extremist factions to threaten the values of equal rights and religious freedom that form the foundation of our society at its best. Targeting and demeaning a group of people based on their identity has repeatedly resulted in entire communities being detained, deported or simply disappearing with no justification. We know from experience that surveillance and repression of entire Muslim communities only demonizes an already marginalized population and puts them at risk of being targeted by harassment and hate violence.